

**IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF MISSISSIPPI
SOUTHERN DIVISION**

DAVID HALE

PLAINTIFF

v.

CIVIL ACTION NO. 1:24cv48 TBM-RPM

**MALCOM M. BAGGETT, II and
TERESA BAGGETT**

DEFENDANTS

COMPLAINT

Plaintiff David Hale (“Plaintiff”) hereby sues Defendants, Malcom M. Baggett, II and Teresa Baggett (“Defendants”) pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12181 *et seq.* (“ADA”), and its implementing regulations, the ADA’s Accessibility Guidelines, 28 C.F.R. Part 36 (“ADAAG”) and alleges as follows:

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

1. Though not required by the ADA, Plaintiff attempted to resolve this matter prior to filing the present complaint by mailing a pre-suit notice letter with a draft complaint to Defendants on November 21, 2023. To date, Defendants have not responded.

2. Defendants’ ADA violations create real and significant barriers to entry for disabled persons such as Plaintiff. Pursuant to Title III of the ADA, Plaintiff seeks declaratory and injunctive relief requiring Defendants to (1) remedy the violations identified herein and (2) enact and adhere to a policy that ensures the proper maintenance of the property to avoid future ADA violations.

JURISDICTION AND PARTIES

3. This is an action for declaratory and injunctive relief pursuant to Title III of the ADA. This Court is vested with original jurisdiction over the action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1333 for Plaintiff's claims pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 12181 *et seq.*, based upon Defendants' failure to remove physical barriers to access and violations of Title III of the ADA.

4. Venue is properly located in the Southern District of Mississippi in the Southern Division pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1391(b) because venue lies in the judicial district of the property situs or the judicial district in which a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to Plaintiff's claims occurred. Defendants' property is located in and does business within this judicial district and all events giving rise to this lawsuit occurred in this judicial district.

5. Plaintiff is and has been at all times relevant to the instant matter, a natural person residing in Mississippi and is *sui juris*.

6. Plaintiff is an individual with disabilities as defined by the ADA.

7. Plaintiff is substantially limited in performing one or more major life activities, including but not limited to: walking and standing.

8. Plaintiff uses a wheelchair for mobility purposes.

9. Plaintiff is also an independent advocate of the rights of similarly situated disabled persons and is a "tester" for the purpose of enforcing Plaintiff's civil rights, monitoring, determining, and ensuring whether places of public accommodation are in compliance with the ADA. Plaintiff's motivation to return to a location, in part, stems from a desire to utilize ADA litigation to make his home community more accessible for Plaintiff and others; and pledges to do whatever is necessary to create the requisite standing to confer jurisdiction upon this Court so an injunction can be issued correcting the numerous ADA violations on the Subject Property, including returning to the Subject Property as soon as it is accessible ("Advocacy Purposes").

10. Defendant Malcom M. Baggett, II is an individual conducting business in the state of Mississippi and within this judicial district.

11. Defendant Teresa Baggett is an individual conducting business in the state of Mississippi and within this judicial district.

FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS

12. On or about May of 2023, Plaintiff attempted to but was deterred from patronizing and/or gaining equal access as a disabled patron to the NAPA Auto Parts Store located at 4009 14th Street, Pascagoula, MS 39567 (“Subject Facility” or “Subject Property”).

13. Defendants are the owners, lessors, and/or operators/lessees of the real property and improvements that are the subject of this action, specifically the NAPA Auto Parts Store and its attendant facilities, including vehicular parking and common exterior paths of travel within the site identified by the Jackson County Assessor parcel identification number 40401374.

14. Plaintiff lives within thirty (30) miles of the Subject Property. Because the Subject Property is located on Denny Avenue, a Jackson County thoroughfare that he frequents routinely, he is routinely where the Subject Property is located and travels in and about the immediate area of the Subject Property numerous times every month, if not every week.

15. Plaintiff’s access to the Subject Property and/or full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and/or accommodations offered therein were denied and/or limited because of his disabilities, and he will be denied and/or limited in the future unless and until Defendants are compelled to remove the physical barriers to access and correct the ADA violations that exist at the Subject Property, including those set forth in this Complaint.

16. Plaintiff has visited, i.e. attempted to patronize, the Subject Property on multiple prior occasions, and at least once before as a patron and advocate for the disabled. Plaintiff intends

on revisiting the Subject Property within six months of the filing of this Complaint or sooner as soon as the barriers to access detailed in this Complaint are removed. The purpose of the revisit is to be a regular patron to determine if and when the Subject Property is made accessible, and to maintain standing for this lawsuit for Advocacy Purposes.

17. Plaintiff intends on revisiting the Subject Property to enjoy the same experiences, goods, and services available to Defendants' non-disabled patron as well as for Advocacy Purposes, but does not intend to continue to repeatedly re-expose himself to the ongoing barriers to equal access and engage in the futile gesture of attempting to patronize the Subject Property, a business of public accommodation known to Plaintiff to have numerous and continuing barriers to equal access for wheelchair users.

18. Plaintiff recently traveled to the Subject Property as a patron and as an independent advocate for the disabled, encountered and/or observed the barriers to access that are detailed in this Complaint, engaged those barriers where physically possible, suffered legal harm and legal injury, and will continue to suffer such harm and injury as a result of the illegal barriers to equal access present at the Subject Property.

19. Plaintiff has a fundamental right as established under the ADA to patronize any place of public accommodation as any person who is not disabled has.

20. Plaintiff's day-to-day life has been negatively affected by the barriers to entry at the Subject Property, as his fundamental right to patronize any place of public accommodation at his choosing has been diminished by Defendant's non-compliance with the ADA.

21. Plaintiff has no obligation to only patronize places of public accommodation that are ADA compliant.

22. If barriers to entry are not removed at the Subject Property, it will place undue hardship, cause Plaintiff loss of opportunity, and unduly force Plaintiff to “search” for a place of public accommodation to patronize that is ADA compliant.

COUNT I – CLAIM FOR INJUNCTIVE RELIEF
(Against Defendant for ADA Violations)

23. The effective date of Title III of the ADA was January 26, 1992 (or January 26, 1993, if a defendant has 10 or fewer employees and gross receipts of \$500,000 or less). 42 U.S.C. § 12181 and 28 C.F.R. § 36.508(a).

24. The Subject Property is a public accommodation and service establishment.

25. Pursuant to the mandates of 42 U.S.C. § 12134(a), on July 26, 1991, the Department of Justice and Office of Attorney General promulgated federal regulations to implement the requirements of the ADA. 28 C.F.R. Part 36.

26. Public accommodations were required to conform to these regulations by January 26, 1992 (or by January 26, 1993, if a defendant has 10 or fewer employees and gross receipts of \$500,000 or less). 42 U.S.C. § 12181 *et seq.* and 28 C.F.R. § 36.508(a).

27. The Subject Property must be, but is not, in compliance with the ADA and the ADAAG.

28. Plaintiff has attempted to, and has to the extent possible, accessed the Subject Property in his capacity as a patron at the Subject Property and as an independent advocate for the disabled, but could not fully do so because of his disabilities resulting from the physical barriers to access, dangerous conditions, and ADA violations that exist at the Subject Property that preclude and/or limit his access to the Subject Property and/or the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and/or accommodations offered therein, including those barriers, conditions, and ADA violations more specifically set forth in this Complaint.

29. Plaintiff intends to visit the Subject Property again in the very near future as a patron and as an independent advocate for the disabled, in order to utilize all of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and/or accommodations commonly offered to able-bodied patrons of the Subject Property but will be unable to fully do so because of his disability and the physical barriers to access, dangerous conditions, and ADA violations that exist at the Subject Property that preclude and/or limit his access to the Subject Property and/or the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and/or accommodations offered therein, including those barriers, conditions, and ADA violations more specifically set forth in this Complaint.

30. Defendants have discriminated against Plaintiff, and others with disabilities, by denying his access to, and full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and/or accommodations of the Subject Property, as prohibited by, and by failing to remove architectural barriers as required by 42 U.S.C. § 12182(b)(2)(A)(iv).

31. Defendants will continue to discriminate against Plaintiff, and others with disabilities, unless and until Defendants are compelled to remove all physical barriers that exist at the Subject Property, including those specifically set forth herein, and make the Subject Property accessible to and usable by Plaintiff and other persons with disabilities.

32. A specific list of unlawful physical barriers, dangerous conditions, and ADA violations which Plaintiff experienced and/or observed that precluded and/or limited Plaintiff's access to the Subject Property and the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and/or accommodations of the Subject Property include, but are not limited to:

ACCESSIBLE ROUTES/PARKING
NAPA Auto Parts Store
(Exterior)

- a. There is no van-accessible parking present in violation of Section 4.6 of the 1991 ADAAG and Section 502 of the 2010 ADAAG. These violations made it dangerous for Plaintiff to utilize the parking facility at the Subject Property and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.
- b. There is no van-accessible parking identified as such with upright “Van Accessible” signage in violation of Section 4.6 of the 1991 ADAAG and Sections 208, 302, and 502 of the 2010 ADAAG. These violations made it dangerous for Plaintiff to utilize the parking facility at the Subject Property and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.
- c. The visible upright signage (displaying the International Symbol of Accessibility) designating the parking space as accessible is mounted too low in violation of Section 4.6 of the 1991 ADAAG and Section 502 of the 2010 ADAAG. These violations made it dangerous for Plaintiff to utilize the parking facility at the Subject Property and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.
- d. The paint delineating the designated accessible parking space and access aisle is not being maintained so that it clearly marks the accessible parking location in violation of 28 C.F.R. § 36.211, Section 4.6 of the 1991 ADAAG, and Section 502.3.3 of the 2010 ADAAG. These violations made it dangerous for Plaintiff to utilize the parking facility at the Subject Property and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.
- e. The access aisle is too narrow in violation of Section 4.1 of the 1991 ADAAG and Section 503 of the 2010 ADAAG. These violations made it dangerous for Plaintiff to utilize the parking facility at the Subject Property and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.
- f. Plaintiff could not safely utilize the parking facility because the designated accessible parking space is not level in all directions because of Defendants’ practice of failing to inspect and maintain the parking surface in violation of 28 C.F.R. § 36.211, Section 4.6.3 of the 1991 ADAAG, and Section 502.4 of the 2010 ADAAG. These violations made it dangerous for Plaintiff to utilize the parking facility at the Subject Property and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.
- g. Plaintiff could not safely utilize the parking facility because the accessible aisle is not level in all directions because of Defendants’ practice of failing to inspect and maintain the parking surface in violation of 28 C.F.R. § 36.211, Section 4.6.3 of the 1991 ADAAG, and Section 502.4 of the 2010 ADAAG. These violations made it dangerous for Plaintiff to utilize the

parking facility at the Subject Property and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.

- h. There is no curb ramp present along the route from the purported designated accessible space to the entrance of the store, in violation of Section 303.4 of the 2010 ADAAG and in violation of 28 C.F.R. § 36.211. These violations made it dangerous for Plaintiff to utilize the parking facility at the Subject Property and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.

NAPA Auto Parts Store
(Interior)

- i. The sales counter is too high for wheelchair users. Violation: The sales counter exceeds the maximum allowable height of 36 inches from the finish floor in violation of Section 7.2 of the 1991 ADAAG and Sections 227.3 and 904.4 of the 2010 ADAAG. These violations made it dangerous for Plaintiff to patronize the Subject Property and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.

MAINTENANCE PRACTICES

- j. Defendants have a practice of failing to maintain the accessible features of the Subject Facility, creating barriers to access for Plaintiff, as set forth herein, in violation of 28 C.F.R. § 36.211. This practice prevented access to Plaintiff equal to that of Defendants' able-bodied customers causing Plaintiff loss of opportunity.
- k. Defendants have a practice of failing to maintain the accessible elements at the Subject Facility by neglecting their continuing duty to review, inspect, and discover transient accessible elements which by the nature of their design or placement, frequency of usage, exposure to weather and/or other factors, are prone to shift from compliant to noncompliant so that said elements may be discovered and remediated.
- l. Defendants have failed and continue to fail to alter their inadequate maintenance practices to prevent future recurrence of noncompliance with dynamic accessible elements at the Subject Facility in violation of 28 C.F.R. § 36.211, the 1991 ADAAG, and the 2010 ADAAG. These violations, as set forth hereinabove, made it impossible for Plaintiff to experience the same access to the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and/or accommodations of the Subject Facility as Defendants' able-bodied patrons and caused Plaintiff loss of opportunity.
- m. Defendants have failed to modify their discriminatory maintenance practices to ensure that, pursuant to their continuing duty under the ADA, the Subject Property remains readily accessible to and usable by disabled

individuals, including Plaintiff, as set forth herein, in violation of 28 C.F.R. §§ 36.302 and 36.211. This failure by Defendants prevented access to Plaintiff equal to that of Defendants' able-bodied customers causing Plaintiff loss of opportunity.

33. The discriminatory violations described above are not an exhaustive list of Defendants' current barriers to equal access and violations of the ADA because Plaintiff was unable to access and assess all areas of the Subject Property due to the architectural barriers encountered. A complete list of the subject location's ADA violations affecting Plaintiff as a wheelchair user, and the remedial measures necessary to remove same, will require an on-site inspection by Plaintiff's representatives pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 34. Once Plaintiff personally encounters discrimination, as alleged above, or learns of discriminatory violations through expert findings of personal observation, has actual notice that Defendants do not intend to comply with the ADA.

34. Defendants have a practice of failing to maintain the accessible elements at the Subject Property by neglecting their continuing duty to review, inspect, and discover transient accessible elements which by the nature of its design or placement, frequency of usage, exposure to weather and/or other factors, are prone to shift from compliant to noncompliant, so that said elements are discovered and remediated. Defendants have failed and continue to fail to alter their inadequate maintenance practices to prevent future recurrence of noncompliance with dynamic accessible elements at the Subject Property in violation of 28 C.F.R. §§ 36.202 and 36.211. These violations, as referenced hereinabove, made it impossible for Plaintiff, as a wheelchair user, to experience the same access to the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and/or accommodations of the Subject Property as Defendants' able-bodied patrons.

35. Accessible elements at the Subject Property have been altered and/or constructed since 2010.

36. The foregoing violations are violations of the 1991 ADAAG and the 2010 ADAAG, as adopted by the U.S. Department of Justice. In instances where the 2010 ADAAG standards do not apply, the 1991 ADAAG standards apply, and all the alleged violations set forth herein can be modified to comply with the 1991 ADAAG standards.

37. The removal of the physical barriers, dangerous conditions, and ADA violations alleged herein is readily achievable and can be accomplished and carried out without significant difficulty or expense. 42 U.S.C. §§ 12182(b)(2)(A)(iv), 12181(9), and 28 C.F.R. § 36.304.

38. Each of the violations alleged herein is readily achievable to modify to bring the Subject Property into compliance with the ADA.

39. Removal of the physical barriers and dangerous conditions present at the Subject Property is readily achievable because of the site conditions at the Subject Property, the structural design of the Subject Facility, and the straightforward nature of the necessary modifications.

40. To assist businesses in offsetting the costs associated with complying with the ADA and removing barriers to access for individuals with disabilities, Section 44 of the IRS Code provides a tax credit for small business owners, and Section 190 of the IRS Code provides a tax deduction for all business owners, including Defendants.

41. Removal of the physical barriers and dangerous conditions at the Subject Property is readily achievable because of the relative low cost of the necessary modifications and Defendants have the financial resources to make the modifications, including the financial assistance made available to Defendants by the government pursuant to Section 44 and/or Section 190 of the IRS Code.

42. By continuing to maintain and/or operate the Subject Property with discriminatory conditions in violation of the ADA, Defendants contribute to Plaintiff's sense of isolation and

segregation and deprive Plaintiff of the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, and accommodations available to able bodied individuals of the general public.

43. Defendants are required to remove the existing architectural barriers to the physically disabled when such removal is readily achievable for their places of public accommodation that have existed prior to January 26, 1992, 28 C.F.R. § 36.304(a); additionally, if there has been an alteration to Defendants' place of public accommodation since January 26, 1992, then Defendants are required to ensure to the maximum extent feasible, that the altered portions of the Subject Facility are readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities, including people who use wheelchairs, 28 C.F.R. § 36.402; and finally, if Defendants' facilities were designed and constructed for first occupancy subsequent to January 26, 1993, as defined in 28 C.F.R. § 36.401, then Defendants' facilities must be readily accessible to and useable by individuals with disabilities as defined by the ADA. To date, Defendants have failed to comply with this mandate.

44. Plaintiff is without adequate remedy at law and is suffering irreparable harm and reasonably anticipates that he will continue to suffer irreparable harm unless and until Defendants are required to remove the physical barriers, dangerous conditions, and ADA violations that exist at the Subject Property, including those alleged herein. Considering the balance of hardships between Plaintiff and Defendants, a remedy in equity is warranted.

45. Plaintiff's requested relief serves the public interest.

46. Plaintiff's counsel is entitled to recover his reasonable attorneys' fees and costs of litigation from Defendants pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §§ 12188, 12205, and 28 C.F.R. § 36.505. Plaintiff will be denied full and equal access to the subject premises, as provided by the ADA unless the injunctive relief requested herein is granted.

47. Pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 12188, this Court is vested with the authority to grant Plaintiff injunctive relief; including an Order to alter the subject facilities to make them readily accessible to, and useable by, individuals with disabilities to the extent required by the ADA, and closing the Subject Facility until the requisite modifications are completed, and ordering Defendants to fulfill their continuing duty to maintain the accessible features at the premises in the future as mandated by 28 C.F.R. § 36.211.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff prays as follows:

- A. That the Court find Defendants in violation of the ADA and ADAAG;
- B. That the Court enter an Order requiring Defendants to (i) remove the physical barriers to access and (ii) alter the Subject Property to make the Subject Property readily accessible to and useable by individuals with disabilities to the full extent required by Title III of the ADA;
- C. That the Court enter an Order directing Defendants, pursuant to 28 C.F.R. § 36.211, to fulfill their continuing duty to maintain their accessible features and equipment so that the Subject Facility remains accessible to and useable by individuals with disabilities to the full extent required by Title III of the ADA;
- D. That the Court enter an Order directing Defendants to implement and carry out effective policies, practices, and procedures to maintain the accessible features and equipment pursuant to 28 C.F.R. §§ 36.302 and 36.211;
- E. That the Court enter an Order directing Defendants to evaluate and neutralize their policies and procedures towards persons with disabilities for such reasonable time so as to allow them to undertake and complete corrective procedures;
- F. An award of attorneys' fees, costs (including expert fees), and litigation expenses pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 12205 and an award of monitoring fees associated with insuring that Defendants are in compliance with the ADA;
- G. An award of interest upon the original sums of said award of attorneys' fees, costs (including expert fees), and other expenses of suit; and

H. Such other relief as the Court deems just and proper, and/or is allowable under Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Respectfully submitted, this the 12th day of February 2024.

Plaintiff David Hale,

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